

The Yew-tree lives to a great age; indeed it can scarcely ever be said to die, new shoots perpetually out from the old and withered stock. The Yew-tree at Ankerwyke House, near Staines, the seat of Blagrove, Esq., is supposed to have flourished there upwards of a thousand years. Tradition says, that Henry occasionally met Anne Boleyn under the lugubrious shade of its spreading branches, at such times placed in the neighbourhood of Staines, in order to be near Windsor; whither the king used to love to go to the cares of state. Ill-omened as was the place of meeting under such circumstances, it afforded but a private emblem of the result of that arbitrary and ungovernable passion, which, overlooking every consideration, was destined finally to hurry its victim to an untimely grave. It is more pleasing, however, to view this tree as the silent witness of the conferences of those brave barons who afterwards compelled John to sign Magna Charta, in its immediate vicinity, between Runnymede and Ankerwyke House. The involuntary confidant of loves so unhalloved, and so unblest, as those of Henry and Anne Boleyn, events are happily alluded to in the following lines:

“What scenes have pass’d, since first this ancient Yew
In all the strength of youthful beauty grew!
Here patriot Barons might have musing stood,
And plann’d the Charter for their Country’s good;
And here, perhaps, from Runnymede retired,
The haughty John, with secret vengeance fired,
Might curse the day which saw his weakness yield
Extorted rights in yonder tented field.
Here too the tyrant Henry felt love’s flame,
And, sighing, breathed his Anna Boleyn’s name:
Beneath the shelter of this Yew-tree’s shade,
The royal lover woo’d the ill-star’d maid:

And yet that neck, round which he fondly hung,
To hear the thrilling accents of her tongue;
That lovely breast, on which his head reclined,
Form’d to have humanized his savage mind;
Were doom’d to bleed beneath the tyrant’s steel,
Whose selfish heart might dote, but could not feel,
O had the Yew its direst venom shed
Upon the cruel Henry’s guilty head,
Ere England’s sons with shuddering grief had seen
A slaughter’d victim in their beauteous queen!”

The girth of this tree, at three feet from the ground, is twenty-seven feet eight inches; at eight feet it is twenty-two feet five inches. Immediately above the latter height there are five principal branches, which extend from the stem in a lateral direction; the respective girths of which are, five feet five inches; six feet ten inches; five feet seven inches; five feet seven inches; and five feet nine inches. Above these branches, there are three more, the girths of which are, at twelve feet from the ground, various branches proceed in a lateral direction, aspiring to the height of forty-nine feet six inches; and spreading their umbrage to the circumference of two hundred and seven feet.

PLATE IX.—THE SALCEY FOREST OAK.

This magnificent tree, still flourishing, even under apparent decay, stands in the forest of Northamptonshire; between the forests of Rockingham to the North, and of Whittlebury to the South, which the woodland part of that county is divided into three main parcels. Of these, Salcey Forest is the smallest; being not more than a mile in breadth, and scarcely a mile and a half in length; but its appearance, enlivened by the variety of spreading thorns, which spring among its majestic oaks, renders it particularly in the beginning of the summer, when they put forth their white blossoms, and scent the air with fragrance, a delightful haunt for the lovers of sylvan scenery. Camden speaks of it as a place set apart for the amusement of the king, and even in the present day, its numerous troops of fallow deer, its tempting copses, and picturesque cattle, give it an animation not less attractive to the sportsman than to the painter.

The Oak which maintains so proud a pre-eminence over all its brethren in this forest, was, in 1711, according to the account of H. Rooke, Esq. F.S.A., in circumference at the bottom, where there are no sprouts, six feet ten inches; at one yard from the ground, twenty-four feet seven inches; at two yards, eight feet six inches; at three yards, sixteen feet two inches. The height within the hollow was at that time thirty feet eight inches, and the height of the tree itself thirty-nine feet three inches. Of its age, a calculation has been formed from the following observations of the ingenious Thomas South, Esq., communicated in a Letter on the growth of Oaks, addressed to the Bath Society. Speaking of an ancient hollow tree at Farm, he informs us, that about twenty years before the time of his writing, he had the curiosity to examine this tree. “Its head,” he proceeds to relate, “was as green and vigorous last summer, as it was at present, and though hollow as a tub, it has increased in its measure some inches. Upon the whole, this tree is a mark of having been a short-stemmed, branched tree, of the first magnitude; spreading its arms in all directions round it. Its aperture is a small, ill-formed gothic arch, hewn out, or enlarged with an axe, and the